

Effective OPSYNCS = Enabled Operations at JRTC

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We know it as the operations synchronization meeting or more commonly called the OPSYNC. It is normally the last staff meeting of the day where each brigade staff member and battalion liaison officer (LNO) representing both brigade and its subordinates acknowledges all requisite analysis and coordination from their respective battle rhythm events and properly aligns and resources subordinate units for mission execution without issue. This meeting is where the brigade combat team (BCT) S3 levels the bubbles and slaps the table to solidify the plan for the next 24-96 hours. Does this sound like your BCT? If not, what is your unit missing or failing to do? What must a unit codify in respective standard operating procedures (SOPs) to improve the OPSYNC? Simply put, executing an effective OPSYNC can equate to enabled operations. This article is designed to be “a way” for brigade S3s and staffs to create their OPSYNC in preparation for any Combat Training Center (CTC) rotation.

Trends

If BCTs treat the OPSYNC as the center of gravity for all battle rhythm outputs, they will increase the percentage of synergy and mission success across their formations. A common trend at the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) at Fort Polk, LA, is that BCTs do not conduct effective OPSYNCS. Effectively led BCT OPSYNCS lead to better enabled battalions and companies/troops/batteries. The first signal or trend is the failure to initiate the battle rhythm event while in the initial staging base (ISB) prior to joint forcible entry (JFE) operations. This sets the stage for building a BCT’s momentum and required attention across the formation before commencing force-on-force operations. The second trend is a lack of an agenda and clearly identified participants to conduct the regularly scheduled OPSYNCS. The third and final trend is a failure to clearly define input and outputs of the meeting with respect to both current operations (CUOPs) and future

operations (FUOPs). A good way to fix these trends prior to arrival is exercising the meeting at home station during a command post exercise (CPX) and field training exercise (FTX). An additional opportunity is to leverage time spent at the CTC’s leader training program (LTP), which is usually conducted four months prior to a rotation, in order to refine SOPs and request feedback from observer-coach-trainer (OCT) counterparts.

Purpose

The OPSYNC process is designed to synchronize subordinate units and attachments and array assets to increase a BCT’s ability to close with and destroy the enemy.

The operations synchronization meeting is a key battle rhythm event to ensure that operations remain synchronized in the short-range planning horizons. At the BCT level, the meeting is chaired by the BCT S3 and attended by the separate staff sections and battalion representatives as required; they

Figure 1 — OPSYNC Trends



meet to assess the progress of current operations and review upcoming decision points and critical events. “Members identify changes in the situation requiring adjustments to the current operation order. They then develop directives to synchronize units and warfighting functions in accordance with the commander’s intent and guidance. Key outputs from this meeting include changes or recommended changes to the current order resulting in a fragmentary order (FRAGORD).”¹

Participants and Agenda

The following personnel at a minimum are recommended to be in attendance for each OPSYNC: BCT S3, chief of operations (CHOPS), battle captain, plans officer, battalion LNOs, brigade aviation element (BAE), air liaison officer (ALO), engineer, explosive ordnance disposal (EOD), information collection (IC) manager, brigade fire support officer (FSO), targeting officer, provost marshal office (PMO), S6, public affairs officer (PAO), S7, and S9. The agenda includes but is not limited to:²

1. Roll call (BCT S3)
2. Review commander’s guidance (BCT S3)
3. Weather update (staff weather officer/S2)
4. Assess last 24 hours, execute next 24 (review), prepare next 48 (validate), plan next 72 (approve), steer the next 96. The below individuals/staff/units brief each category; to stay sequenced, everyone briefs one category in its entirety and upon completion they then transition to the next category (24 hours).
 - a. Intelligence (BCT S2)
 - b. Movement and maneuver (BCT S3, BAO)
 - c. Fires (BCT FSO, targeting officer)
 - d. Maneuver support (chief of maneuver support)
 - e. Sustainment (BCT S4, S1)
 - f. Mission Command (BCT S3, S6)
 - g. Information Operations (S9)
 - h. Subordinate units
 - i. Other staff by exception
5. Recommended changes to the current order
6. Guidance

Inputs and Outputs

Clearly defined inputs and outputs must be known across the warfighting functions to create an effective OPSYNC. The BCT S3 must ensure the format follows an agenda and that outputs from the OPSYNC are distributed to subordinates via a daily FRAGORD which should be published following the meeting to keep both the BCT staff and subordinate units informed with the most current information. If executed properly, units can rely on a system which arrays assets, creates a shared understanding, and ultimately enables subordinate units to a higher degree of mission success.

Warfighting Function Inputs

Intel — Input requirements are an event template, information collection matrix, most likely/most dangerous course of action, and priority information requirements (PIR).

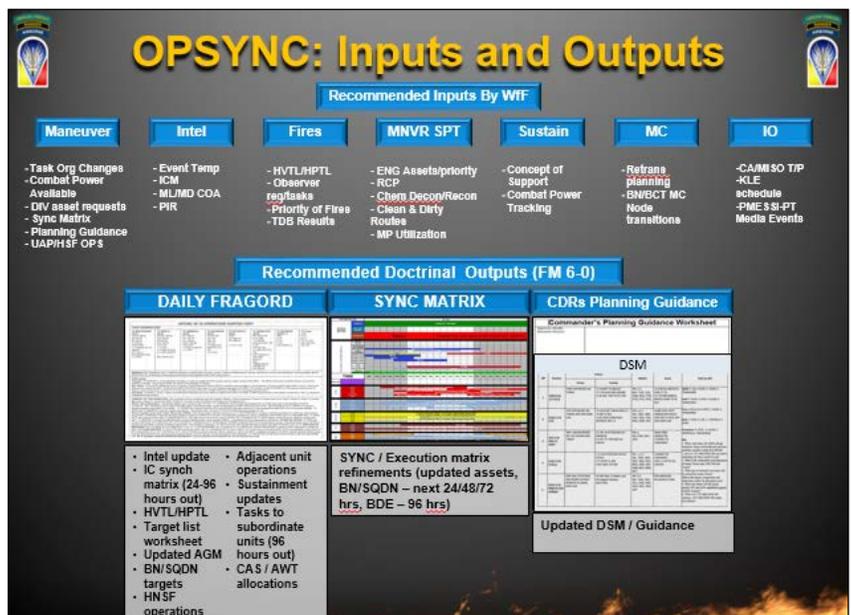


Figure 2 — OPSYNC Inputs and Outputs

Movement and maneuver — Input requirements are task organization changes, combat power, BCT/division asset request available, sync matrix, and planning guidance.

Fires — Input requirements are high-value target list (HVTL) and high-payoff target list (HPTL), observer requirements/tasks, priority of fires, targeting decision board results, and family of scatterable mines (FASCAM) request.

Maneuver support — Input requirements are engineer assets/priority, route clearance package requirements/tasks, chemical decon/recon, clean and dirty routes, route status, and Military Police (MP) utilization.

Sustainment — Input requirements are concept of support, combat power tracking, and transportation capabilities.

Mission command — Input requirements are retrans planning, battalion/BCT mission command post transitions, and lower/upper tactical internet (TI) plans.

Information operations — Input requirements are Civil Affairs (CA)/Military Information Support Operations (MISO) task and purpose, key leader engagement (KLE) schedule, PMESSI-PT (political, military, economic, social, information, infrastructure, physical environment, and time), and media events.

Subordinate units (maneuver battalions, cavalry squadron, field artillery battalion, brigade engineer battalion [BEB], brigade support battalion [BSB], aviation task force) — Input can include mission, intent, and end states; task/purpose for each company and key enabler; refined graphics; demonstrate how operations nest and support the BCT; anticipated friction and subsequent adjustments to the plan for approval; asset confirmation; and any final requests for BCT support.

Warfighting Function Outputs

The daily FRAGORD defines tasks for execution by

subordinate elements; it synchronizes assets in time and space visually depicted on the execution or synchronization matrix (enabling PLANS-CUOPS transition). Battalion and brigade asset requests to division are identified and completed within the planning horizons and air tasking order (ATO) cycle.

* **FRAGORD** — It includes intel update, IC matrix (24-96 hours), sync/execution matrix, close air support (CAS)/air weapons team (AWT) allocations, HVTL/HPTL, target list worksheet (TLWS), updated attack guidance matrix (AGM), battalion/squadron targets, host nation security force operations, adjacent unit operations, sustainment updates, tasks to subordinate units 96 hours out.

* **Execution or synchronization matrix** — Matrix refinements (assets updates, battalion/squadron – next 24/48/72 hours, brigade – 96 hours).

* **Decision support matrix (DSM)** — Updated DSM/commander's guidance.

* **Asset request/allocation** — Confirm CAS apportionment (72-96 hours out), CAS allocations (24-48 hours out), and attack rotary wing allocation (24-96 hours out).

Planning Horizon

OPSYNCs should last less than 60 minutes, and staff members must come prepared. By scheduling this meeting last in the order of battle rhythm events, it allows for all the synchronization meeting outputs throughout the day to create inputs for the meeting. The meeting must be constructed in a manner that affords 10-15 minutes of discussion per 24-hour time period but maintains the flexibility to refine the plan with respect to a reallocation of assets or timing which best supports the operational environment.

* **Assess (Last 24)** — One of the 11 functions of a command post is assessing operations. Assessment involves the determination of progress by comparing forecasted outcomes with actual events that results in a measure of effectiveness for a specific force employment against a desired end state.³ This sync meeting is for the S2 and the targeting officer to brief the effects of the operations conducted by the brigade and its subordinates.

* **Execute (Review less than 24)** — During this phase of the synchronization process, the battle captain or CHOPs is responsible for briefing this part and covers an in-depth asset allocation utilizing the execution or synchronization matrix and a brief brigade scheme of maneuver. The brigade is in execution mode and covers significant issues that need to be immediately resolved to maintain momentum in the execution of the CUOPs fight. The S2 recaps the enemy situation highlighting any changes to previously briefed situation templates. Maneuver units brief their finalized plans or any changes and what requirements are necessary for their success.

* **Prepare (Validate less than 48 hours)** — This part of the OPSYNC is to validate operations for the next 48 hours and to officially transition the ownership of the fight from FUOPS to CUOPs. Requests for information (RFIs) from the

previous OPSYNC are answered; resources are validated; and coordinating instructions are issued with the supporting and supported units. Issues or concerns from subordinate units and staff are also resolved.

* **Plan 72 hours (Approve)** — At this point in the OPSYNC, the brigade staff begins to move from conceptual to detailed planning. During this process, subordinate units acknowledge their tasks and communicate their initial concept of operations; requests for assets are submitted and then allocated by the brigade S3 for the next 72 hours. These requests are submitted that evening to division or higher to be allocated into the air tasking order (ATO) approval process. In this phase of the planning process, battalion commanders can have the most impact into the brigade's plan. Allowing recommendations enables a truly collaborative planning process with the brigade and its subordinates. The lead planner is responsible for ensuring that the plan is synchronized and that an execution or sync matrix is being completed throughout the operations process and then updated during the wargame.

* **Next 96 hours (Steer)** — During this part of the OPSYNC, the focus of the meeting is for the plans officer or the brigade S3 to review the commander's planning guidance and the brigade's proposed/potential missions from higher for the next 96 hours. The plans officer reviews any initial planning concepts or developments with course of action (COA) development or decision. The targeting officer reviews the nominated HPTL/HVTL and targeting priorities for the next 96 hours to include the results of the targeting decision board. The BCT S3 provides direction to the planning staff and informs the battalion S3s or LNOs of their potential unit tasks. Questions are tailored to what is required to continue the planning process for the FUOPs cell.

Conclusion

BCTs must address OPSYNC trends prior to their arrival at a CTC. Learning organizations leverage home-station training opportunities and CTC LTP windows to refine their systems before rotation execution. Brigade S3s own the preparation of the OPSYNC by clearly defining each warfighting function inputs and outputs, but they must also hold each primary staff member and LNO accountable. If BCT staff members are fully engaged in their respective battle rhythm events, then an effective OPSYNC will ensue that enables subordinate battalions with a greater percentage of mission success.

Notes

¹ Army Techniques Publication 6-0.5, *Command Post Organization and Operations* (March 2017), A-9.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid, 1-3.

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